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Phipps prevails in duel to finish

By Keith Lair Staff Writer
Inside SOCAL

IRWINDALE - It only took two weeks to get Irwindale Speedway's champions to the front of the pack.

Andrew Phipps of Simi Valley, the 2005 Super Late Model champion, held off two-time Super Late Model champion Rip Michels of Mission Hills in a final 14-lap two-car duel to win the 75-lap ACDelco series race Saturday night in front of 2,500.

Phipps and Michels went side by side for nearly all of the final 14 laps. Phipps controlled the outside groove and let Michels burn up his tires trying to work by him inside. Michels twice gave Phipps a love tap in Turn 3 to try and loosen up for a pass. Michels got the lead on the 65th lap, but Phipps got the lead right back a lap later.

He led the final 11 laps.

"All I could do was go as fast as I possibly could go in the fast line," Phipps said. "I knew he would not wreck me, so I kept pedaling as fast as I could. I had to keep the pedal on the floor."

It was the first 75-lap Super Late Model race since 2005.

"I was a little off, but my front right wasn't right," Michels said.

"All I could do was try and wiggle him and try a Bonsai move at the end."

Another champion, 2006 Late Model titlist Travis Thirkettle, was also in the mix. The Newhall resident finished third in his second Super Late race.

Rick Crow of Simi Valley scored a double by taking the field-short BG Product Pure Stock series races for his 10th consecutive victory. He won the six-car 25-lap oval race and 12-lap Figure-8 race.

Pat Mintey Jr. of Quartz Hill survived a wild final lap to win the 40-lap King Taco Super Trucks series main event. South Hills High School football coach Brian Johnson won a spin-filled Justice Brothers Mini Stocks 30-lap main event.

For awhile in the Super Lates, the top four drivers were all track champions, with Rod Johnson of Canyon Country running fourth.

Phipps, 31, who sat out last year, was not expecting to race this year until he received a phone call from car owner Greg Lobosky of Walnut. He has won 29 races at Irwindale.

"I'm so happy to be driving a race car," he said. "I do it for free. I'm not getting anything out of it. I just wanted to drive. It's the greatest thing to drive these cars."

The leading three cars went out in a wreck one-third of the way into the race. Mike Price of Harbor City held the lead for the first 24 laps, but Kevin Wood of Stuart, Va. and the famed NASCAR family, got into the back of Price, spinning both.

David Beat of El Cajon, who won the season opener two weeks ago, suffered brake problems. He left the track during the caution flag to fix it, but when he re-entered when the race turned green, he could not turn his car at speed and went right into the Turn 1 wall. That brought out the race's third caution flag.

There was caution for debris on the 61st lap and on that restart, fourth-place runner Lenny White of Fontana got crowded up the track on the backstretch and hit the wall.

Mintey, second-place finisher Logan Henson of Valencia and third-place finisher Joe Herold of Poway traded the lead over the final nine laps.

"It was probably the best race I have driven in a long time," Mintey said. "I was so bad last year. But we never quit. We just

stayed tough."

Mintey finished third in the point standings last year, but in his final four races of 2006, his best finish was fourth. He did not win last season.

The race had a 15-minute red flag. On a race restart on the 31st lap, Josh Barker of Yucaipa hit the Turn 1 wall, The car driven by John Sereika of Norco wound up teetering on its side for five minutes before track officials pushed it back onto its four wheels. Mason Britton of Sacramento also was knocked out with front-end damage.

None of the drivers were seriously injured.

Herold, who won two weeks ago, went underneath Henson on the restart and had the lead a lap later. Mintey got below Henson and then Herold, in Turn 3 of the 33rd lap and was in front with six laps remaining.

Johnson, from Covina, took the lead on the 11th lap, bumping his way past polesitter Dennis Croasmun of Alta Loma. When Brenda Pugh of Quartz Hill blew an engine, the racing got wild with cars spinning all over the third-mile track. The race went on to finish green-white-checkered because of the spins caused by the oil.

Rich Garver of Torrance finished second and Steve Tyler of Riverside was third.

With Jeff Elder, from Redlands, hogging the inside line, Crow took the lead on the 17th lap by going from the outside all the way around the third-mile oval. Mike Coleto Jr. of Chatsworth took second and Elder was third.

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